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DEPT. FOR DAS BRYZA AND EUR/CARC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/14/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: DAS BRYZA DISCUSSES ABKHAZIA WITH SRSG ARNAULT

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: In a May 9 meeting with DAS Bryza, UN Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) Jean Arnault gave his assessment of the recent reinforcement of Russian peacekeepers in Abkhazia, Georgian unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) overflights and the prospects for changing the negotiating format between Georgia and Abkhazia. He said he thought recent Russian actions in Abkhazia - including withdrawal from CIS sanctions, instructions to upgrade relations with the separatist regions, shooting down unmanned aerial drones, and reinforcing Russian peacekeeping forces with airborne troops - were largely uncoordinated. However, Arnault opined that the lifting of sanctions and April 16 instructions were probably a calibrated response to Kosovo's independence. The United Nations Observer Mission to Georgia (UNOMIG) was concerned about the reinforcement of the PKF with a Russian paratrooper battalion equipped with ten 122 mm D-30 howitzers. Arnault said he has asked CIS PKF commander Chaban for the Russian threat assessment behind the PKF reinforcements and for a justification of the artillery attached to the paratrooper battalion. EUR DAS Bryza briefed Arnault on a May 8 meeting of the Western Friends of the Secretary General (FOSG), in which he proposed reviving the Abkhazia peace process through direct Georgian-Abkhaz negotiations to elaborate President Saakashvili's peace initiatives; firm political pressure on Russia to prevent further infringement on Georgia's sovereignty; and the creation of a new forum to provide advice and raise money for the implementation of economic, social, and information links between Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia. Arnault agreed the current Friends process was not producing results and embraced Bryza's proposal but cautioned against format change by the Georgians without prior consultation with the Abkhaz. Arnault said UNOMIG considered Georgian UAV flights to be a violation of the 1994 Moscow cease-fire agreement on the grounds of separation of forces, but noted the U.S. position that unarmed UAVs cannot be read retrospectively into the agreement and provide military transparency. Arnault also told Bryza that an international experts group would arrive on May 12 to begin their investigation into the April 20 shoot-down of a Georgian UAV. End Summary.

Recent Russian moves linked to Kosovo

12. (C) Arnault said that he was not convinced that the recent moves by the Russians - lifting of economic and military sanctions, Putin's instructions, and the PKF reinforcements - were part of a pre-planned sequence of events. He said he thought the first two were a response to Kosovo's independence, and was of two minds about the PKF reinforcements. He said he was undecided whether the new peacekeepers, particularly the paratrooper battalion, represented a potential offensive force (possibly for an operation in the Georgian-controlled Kodori gorge) or simply a response to a perceived modification in Georgia's military posture. It is possible that because the paratroopers deployed rapidly, they were forced to bring all of their

equipment, including the artillery attached to the battalion.

He said he has asked the commander of the CIS PKF, General Chaban, for a justification for the presence of ten 122 mm howitzers as part of a peacekeeping mission. If the Russians do not provide a credible justification, Arnault said UNOMIG would ask the PKF to remove the artillery. Bryza said that regardless of Georgia's military posture, which appeared to be a defensive reaction to Russian moves, it was not acceptable for the Russians not to notify either the Georgians or UNOMIG in advance of reinforcing the PKF. Statements by senior Russian military officials indicating Russia would use military force if compelled to do so made it clear that Russia is acting as a party to the conflict.

13. (C) Bryza characterized the current Friends process as broken, noted that Russia was clearly not acting as a "facilitator" of the peace process, and laid out a proposal for reviving Georgian-Abkhaz settlement talks. Bryza described a three-point plan to : (1) encourage Georgia to elaborate its proposal of autonomy for Abkhazia; (2) put pressure on Russia to prevent further infringement of Georgia's sovereignty; and (3) create a new forum to oversee the implementation of measures to create economic, social, and information links between Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia, and to foster direct Georgian-Abkhaz talks. Arnault agreed that Russia had not behaved as a mediator since 1997, and that the Group of Friends was essentially the Western Friends, but underscored the importance of the Friends as an important multilateral negotiating format. He characterized the current situation as both sides using the West to advance their own agendas, and both sides content with the status quo. He said the Georgians think that if the West mobilizes strong pressure against Russia, they will push Russia out of

TBILISI 00000844 002 OF 002

Abkhazia, while the Abkhaz think that a confrontation between the West and Russia will ultimately secure their independence.

Abkhaz caught between 'a pig and a dog'

14. (C) Arnault told Bryza that the Abkhaz feel a tremendous amount of unhappiness and frustration about their current situation and now realize that Russia will never recognize their independence. Russia provides just enough investment to keep Abkhazia from breaking down, he said, but substantial economic assistance has not materialized following the March 6 lifting of economic sanctions. The Abkhaz realize now that Russia will instead invite Abkhazia to become a part of Russia, a notion they are very uncomfortable with, to gain real economic development. Arnault said the Abkhaz see themselves as stuck between a pig (Russia) that wants to gobble up all of Abkhazia and a dog (Georgia), that wants to attack Abkhazia and take it back by force. For any breakthrough in negotiations between the Georgians and Abkhaz to happen, he said, Georgia has to stop acting like an attack dog. Instead, the Georgians need to send a clear signal that they are not the enemy, that they genuinely want the Abkhaz to be autonomous and demonstrate such intent. Aside from the UAV incidents, he said, the situation in the security zone has been very quiet. Georgia needs to keep the situation calm and send a strong signal to the Abkhaz that Georgia is not the enemy.

UNOMIG considers UAV flights a violation

15. (C) Arnault said that UNOMIG does not agree with the legal or political arguments in support of Georgian UAV flights over Abkhazia. An aircraft is an aircraft, he said, and the Abkhaz cannot tell if a UAV is unarmed. Bryza countered that the U.S. view is that the UAVs increase transparency by providing assurance to the Georgians of what is happening in Abkhazia, especially outside the UN patrol zone. The Ambassador pointed out that the fundamental problem with the UN position was that the Georgian UAVs cannot be armed. Arnault agreed to consider the matter

further and consult with UN DPKO on the issue. Arnault also suggested re-engaging Georgia and Russia on allowing UN UAVs to patrol the security zone. He said the Georgian side met with UNOMIG Chief Military Observer Khattak a month and a half ago, but UNOMIG still has not received an official Georgian response on allowing UN UAV patrols. Bryza asked if the UN could deploy UAVs quickly once they got approval from the sides, and Arnault said that they would push for it.

¶6. (C) Arnault also mentioned that UNOMIG would have two international (one EU and one UK) experts arriving on Monday, May 12 to lend their expertise to the ongoing investigation into the April 20 shoot-down of a Georgian UAV. He denied that UNOMIG was in any way against a separate, independent EU investigation into the incident, and said he has repeatedly told the EU this. He said he expected the results of the UNOMIG investigation by May 16.

¶7. (U) DAS Bryza cleared this cable.

TEFFT